

Zitierhinweis

van't Spijker, Ineke: review of: Jean Grosfillier (ed.), L'œuvre de Richard de Saint-Victor. 1: De contemplatione (Beniamin maior), Turnhout: Brepols, 2013, in: Francia-Recensio, 2014-1, Mittelalter - Moyen Âge (500-1500), downloaded from recensio.net

First published:

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**L'œuvre de Richard de Saint-Victor. 1: De contemplatione (Beniamin maior).
Texte latin, introduction, traduction et notes par Jean Grosfillier, Turnhout
(Brepols) 2013, 671 p. (Sous la règle de saint Augustin, 13), ISBN
978-2-503-54758-9, EUR 75,00.**

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This edition and translation of one of the major works of Richard of Saint-Victor, published in the series »Sous la règle de saint Augustin«, is a welcome addition to a growing number of translations of Victorine texts. Marc-Aeilko Aris' text published in 1996¹, based on Bibliothèque municipale de Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale 302, was already an improvement of the text published in Migne's »Patrologia Latina«. Jean Grosfillier's text may not offer a critical edition in the traditional sense, based on the whole manuscript tradition, but, using mainly the Paris manuscript Bibliothèque Mazarine 769, this is a text that is probably as close as possible to Richard's text; the critical apparatus shows the variant readings (p. 60). He also offers a French translation, with an Introduction and, apart from the explanatory notes accompanying the text, also some very useful supplementary notes. In the Introduction Grosfillier summarizes what we know about Richard (who came to the community of Saint-Victor just outside Paris in the 1140s and became prior there in 1162), and discusses his writings, before analysing the »De contemplatione« one of Richard's major works. In »De contemplatione« Richard applies an allegorical, or as he says, »mystical« reading to the biblical story of the building of the Ark of the Covenant, as symbolising, in its various materials and different parts, the different stages and aspects of the contemplative process. The reader is invited to employ (combinations of) the human faculties of imagination, then reason, and finally understanding, to consider first »visible things«, then their »invisible reasons«, and finally »spiritual natures« and the divine. Often this work has been seen as a first systematic account of mysticism, but Grosfillier points out how later notions of mysticism may present an anachronistic prism which distorts somewhat Richard's thought: for Richard *mysticus* refers to a hidden sense of Scripture, in this case of the description of the building of the Ark of the Covenant. Grosfillier propagates and demonstrates an open reading of this work, pointing out how Richard uses e. g. *genus*, *modus*, *gradus* interchangeably for different genres, sorts, or stages of contemplation: the effort to strictly define certain categories ignores perhaps Richard's view of the fluidity of contemplative thought (p. 9) and also of the continuity between the different »stages« and between man's different faculties. On the other hand, here and in many notes, Grosfillier also points to a wider context of contemplative traditions, in Christianity as well as in other cultures.

¹ Marc-Aeilko Aris, *Contemplatio. Philosophische Studien zum Traktat Benjamin Maior des Richard von St. Victor. Mit einer verbesserten Edition des Textes*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996.

In the Introduction, Grosfillier also draws attention to the style of Richard's work, which betrays its oral origin, for example in the often dialogic approach of his readers or hearers, when he urges them: »consider ...«, »don't you see ...«, but also including author and audience in a shared experience. Richard employs rhetorical figures such as antithesis and parallelisms, but also a »play of sounds« – examples of which are often pointed out in the notes which accompany the text – to help the reader, or rather, hearer, in memorizing the text.

Apart from the critical apparatus where variant readings are mentioned, Richard's biblical sources are noted, showing how his text, as so many others from the same milieu, is impregnated by biblical language and biblical images. Although here and there one could argue about alternatives, the fine translation itself is accurate and fluent, conveying, and doing justice to, the spirit of Richard's work.

An important and welcome point is made in one of the supplementary notes, where Grosfillier confronts the question of the affective or cognitive character of the »extatic experience«. Often, Richard is quoted as representing a more cognitive approach, compared with the more affective manner of a Bernard of Clairvaux. Grosfillier points out that for most of the ancient writers the question does not occur as an either-or (indeed, for example for Augustine, achieving any form of knowledge is not possible without some form of affective impulse or love). If anything, this point could have been made even stronger (as was demonstrated by Hideki Nakamura²). Moreover, as Grosfillier points out, in the context of »extatic experience« words such as »knowledge« are often used in an ambiguous way. For Richard, the affective side is definitely important, not just as a stimulant for the process of »knowing«, but also as, in its turn, nourished by newly acquired knowledge: both are mutually dependent on each other, just as in Hugh of Saint-Victor as well. Richard follows Hugh in his emphasis on knowledge and affect-led virtue, representing the original *imago* and *similitudo Dei*, as the twin elements in man's restoration of his pre-lapsarian nature. In »De contemplatione« the emphasis is, as the word contemplation implies, on some form of knowledge, and on »regaining« an always transitory final stage of this process, but in other works, for example »De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis«, to which Grosfillier refers, but also in Richard's »De exterminatione mali et promotione boni«, Richard emphasises how the reader, after having perhaps tasted a form of knowing extasy, in a following step is conformed to the exemplar of Christ, and returns to his »brothers«, his capacity to »serve« them enhanced. Thus, the »affective« aspects are coloured by a distinctive Victorine devotional emphasis, different from the affective identification with gospel stories about Jesus with which William of Saint-Thierry or Bernard often present their readers. Even while these proposed affective journeys are still very much guided by their exegesis, these authors posit a dichotomy between affect and reason which was alien to Hugh and Richard.

Other supplementary notes offer a useful glossary of key words such as *anima*, *animus*, *mens*; *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, *contemplatio*; *intellectus*; *intelligentia*, and an explanation of concepts indicating

² Hideki Nakamura, *Amor invisibilium. Die Liebe im Denken Richards von Sankt Viktor († 1173)*, Münster 2011 (Corpus Victorinum. Instrumenta, 5).

the contemplative experience such as *excessus mentis*. Here again, the author is careful to distinguish later Baroque layers that have come to be attached to, for example, words such as »extasy« from what, for Richard, is the endpoint of a process of increasing concentration, and he translates it as »outrépassement«.

Together with the Introduction and an abundance of notes accompanying the text, these explanations make this into a very valuable guide, not only to Richard's work, but also to its wider context.